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SONNETS OF MY LIFE



BY

NITA PIERSON



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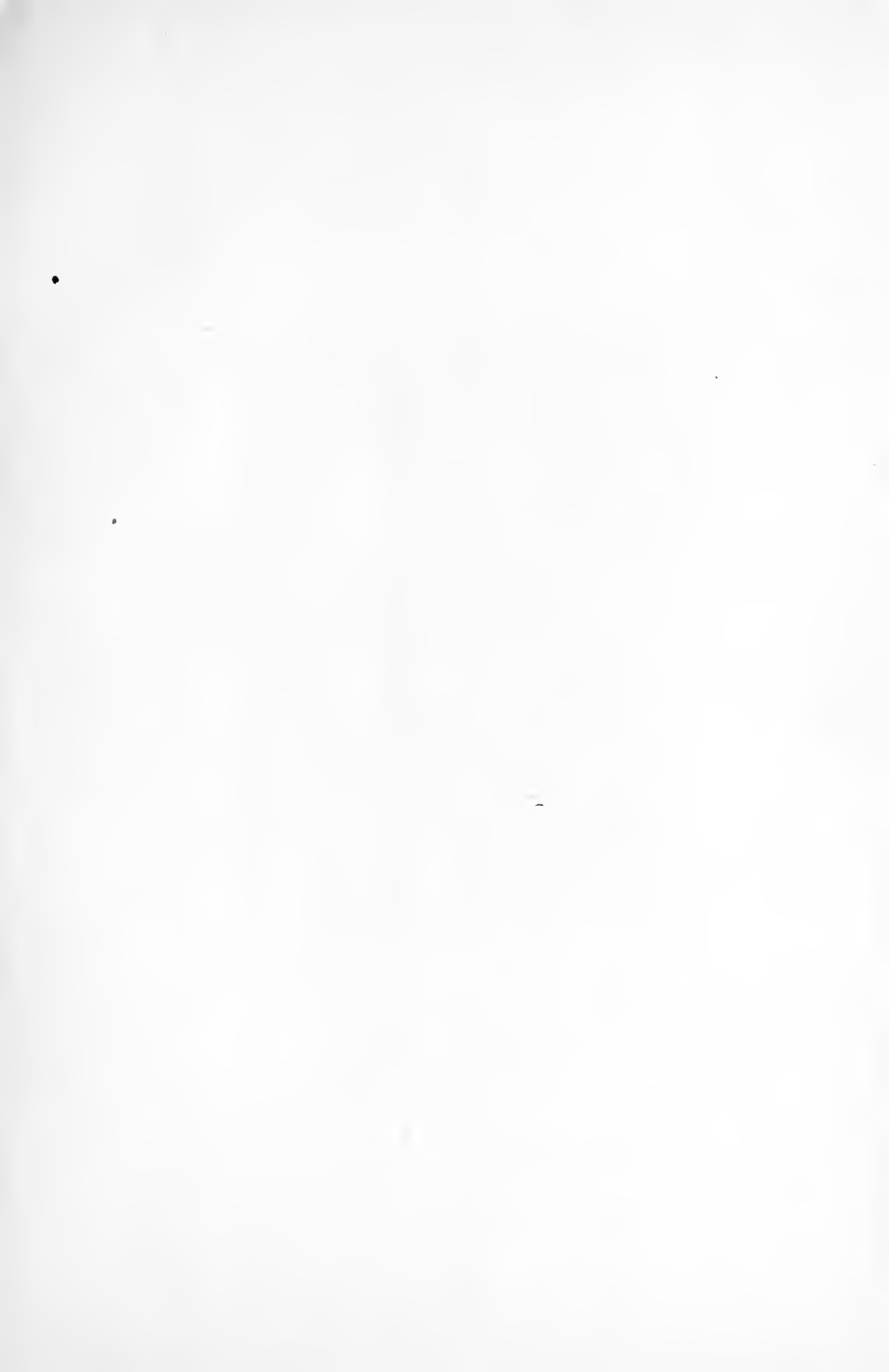
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TO MY DAUGHTER.

Afflicted of my womb—foredoomed to prove
A mother's love outreaching farthest space!
I do not weep your helpless, lost embrace,
Remembering how you fled this world whereof
You knew no evil thing, nor lack of love.
O blighted blossom with the lily's grace
Of heaven suffusing your ethereal face!
None saw, save I, the nimbus rayed above.

Divine embodiment of my solitude,
Why should I weep for you who know no tears?
So much of crushing Time have we withstood,
What matters now—a day or months or years?
Serene, I wait, in peace with you to lie,
When God concedes to me the right to die.

NITA PIERSON.

San Francisco, August, 1916.

LOVE SONNETS TO THE WHITE-SOULED
MAN.

I.

These sonnets made for you, love, dare you claim?
Or shall your lips remain forever sealed,
So that, by neither speech nor sign revealed,
They pass beneath the silence of your shame,
To alien hands, in my beloved's name?
If this be so indeed—then have I kneeled
To one as vain as any god congealed
Within a pagan idol's gilded frame.

Nay, love, I love you for that name I gave;
And love the name for being all of you;
White-souled!—epitome of all the brave,
The good in man; a friend as rare as true!
And great enough, I know, to give the fool
Your high heart's pity for his ridicule.

II.

Your roses glorify my chamber's space!
As if to tell me that they do not miss
The outer air, they radiate the bliss,
The light, your presence yields to all the place.
But oh, too eager seem they to efface
Their beauty in oblivion's abyss;
So zealously, unfolding petals kiss
The plundering hours that pass and leave no trace.

No trace of color, perfume, bud or bloom
That now in riotous joy of living smile
Upon a friendly sun within my room.
And this it is that makes me sad the while:
To know, that as they perish leaf by leaf,
My fleeting joy in you must be as brief.

III.

Upon the altar stone of your desire
Impetuously my rose of love I cast!
My rose, whose tender petals shall outlast
The fitful flare of maddening passion's fire.
And to another's need, that dares aspire
But to my rose alone from all the vast
Array of blooms for his acceptance massed,
I toss a painted, paper thing on wire!

Above your guarded, worldly heart you wear
Love's oriflamme with pleased, complacent air.
While he, that other, clutching Love's alloy,
Drops swift on bended knee, and oh! God knows!
Is happier with his painted, paper toy
Than you who flaunt Love's glowing, glorious rose!

IV.

None knew how tired we were, my heart and I;
Despairingly, as little children are
Who through the shadowed ways have wandered far,
Unloved, untaught, beneath an alien sky,—
Whose every breath is weighted with a sigh.
When lo, there gleamed above the misted bar
Of sea and cloud a single, friendly star,
Wan, wasting hopes to raise and glorify!

And now, as ever by its guiding light,
We, comforted, go singing on our way,
Swift-winged desires unto its reachless height
Fare forth resistlessly by night and day.
Sometimes in dreams upon its breast we lie:
To wake and find it so, were first to die.

Oh, I have heard you say, "I love you!" though
'T was said impulsively, beneath the stress
Of my abandonment to your caress:
Avowed (against reflection cool, I know)
For pity rather, since I craved it so.
And yet—the lips, the eyes that mine possess,
Confirm what words retractingly confess.
Were I but brave enough to turn and go
Into the agonizing, loveless mist
Of tears that blinded me before you came.
I dream that you would follow, nor resist
The want to call me by some tender name.
Ah, Love, delve deep within your heart to see
The wealth of love it holds, and all for me!

VI.

Do you recall the night we fought the rain,
Its rude tears trickling down my laughing face,
And how we huddled close to keep in pace
While furious winds defied your efforts vain
To shield me from their rage? Love, I was fain
To walk forever so, might I but place
My arm in yours, and cling to leave no space
Between our bodies' heat for aught of pain.

Exulting joy was mine for that brief while,
Combating, struggling equally with you;
For so the moods of Nature reconcile
The barriers men have set betwixt us two.
Some chance have I 'gainst Nature's strife and din;
Against the law of man—no hope to win.

VII.

If I were all that you would have me be,
My soul's God-given robe had never trailed
Its liliated hem where pampered lust prevailed
To mar forever its virginity.

These lips against your coming had been free
Of kisses sold that, price-surrendered, paled
My passive cheeks red rose to white, and flailed
My soul with self-abasing agony!

Yet had I never known the woe of night,
I could not love so well the daylight fair;
Nor comprehend the wonder of your height,
Save from the depths that grief and anguish share;
For when it seemed that God forgot me quite,
You came, an anodyne to my despair!

VIII.

I know an isolated house within
Whose dominating windows calm allure
The limpid globes of azure lamps immure
A soul-stilled flame beyond the reach of sin.
From where the lowly ways of love begin,
Unto that sanctuaried radiance pure,
Tip-toed, I lift hands eager to secure
The rarest, sweetest gift that heart can win.

What matter that I stand beyond the pale
Of flower-bordered path and sheltering door?
That light is all my God and will not fail
To pierce my dark-in-life forevermore.
An outcast at the gates of Paradise!
Love, let this be my sonnet to your eyes.

IX.

Gray mist and gold is this night's symphony;
High ceiled and vast with purpling, sabled cloud.
The river, apathetic as a shroud
Above the tears of an eternity
Of humankind, winds placidly to sea.
Beneath my window, lovers, shyly proud,
Stroll by, fair heads upturned to heads low bowed.
The golden lights gleam unconcernedly.

Somewhere the joyous laughter of a child
Breaks sudden like spilled stars in scattering flight.
And there, an aged couple, love-beguiled,
Impart a touch of heaven to the night.
And I? . . . I yearn with poignant grief, and pine
For one dear heart beyond the reach of mine.

SONNETS OF THE PANAMA-PACIFIC
INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION.

THE HISTORY OF THE

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THE EXPOSITION FROM THE HILL.

Where the long street attains its utmost height,

I, jostling amiably the crowd for room,

Beheld the citied jewel, Venture's bloom,

Low-plained before me in resplendent night—

A joy forever to my raptured sight.

Far arms of rainbow light fanned from the tomb

Where sea and sky receded into gloom;

A car clanged down the hill in burdened flight.

Achieving San Francisco well may boast

That where this strip of conquering beauty lies,

Short years ago was but a mudded coast,

Malingering waste beneath reproachful skies.

And marveling thus at tower and spire, I knew

That even I might dare, and, daring, do!

San Francisco, April, 1915.

THE PALACE OF FINE ARTS.

Mankind here templed peace with folded wing
In quietude eternal and sublime,
Serenely gleaned from the hoards of Time
Transcendent loveliness,—soliciting
The passing heart to bide for solacing.
Wan lights athwart majestic columns climb;
The silence silvers to a cricket's chime;
Faint ripples o'er the sombre waters swing.

And yet, beyond the dark's remotest rim,
Beyond the leagues and leagues of sundering sea,
The peace shrined here is but despotic whim!
For man agrees in blood to disagree;
Man ravening past man's power to retrieve!
Knew I not so, so could I ne'er conceive.

III.

THE COURT OF ABUNDANCE.

Abundance in abundance, man-avowed!
By wizardry supreme of head and hand,
Impressive symbols of earth's plenty stand
In this fair court revealed to sun and cloud.
Yea, here the fruits of man's rich genius crowd,
Mute messengers of soul, at his command;
Attesting a supply divinely planned:
Enough for all, and more, hath God allowed.

Then why the children drooping at the loom
And men who ask in vain for work and bread,—
Frail mothers slaving in bare pittance'd gloom
And shameful host of needless infant dead?
Forgive! O God! the mighty and the strong!
We know this should not be, this grievous wrong.

THE COURT OF THE UNIVERSE.

Herein are merged all things of all the world;
For from the farthest, ancient isle, at last,
Has onward, treasure-bearing commerce passed
Unto our gate, and through; and just years hurled
Gyved slavery from her mart. God's blessings, furled
In wedded seas, in fruits and flowers massed
Against rich hills 'neath skies benign and vast,
Adorn our gate, prosperity impearled.

Portrayed by man on each triumphal arch
The progress-blazers of the centuries go;
From Orient and Occident they march,
And this the truth they vision, live and know:
So much remains of evil to abate,
Look up and love! There is no time for hate.

SONNETS OF IMPRESSIONS AND TRIBUTE.

AMERICA TO THE WORLD.

*"Art thou her child, . . . And canst thou now
Watch with a stranger's gaze?"*

By WM. WATSON.

Daughter of none, mother to all, am I!
 Conflicting children of one Father pour
 Into my arms from every alien shore.
 Throughout my welcoming, plentied lands they hie,
 Unlearning hate; forgetting to deny
 The brotherhood of man forevermore—
 Men of all nations living door to door,
 In peace progressing and in peace to die.

The melting-pot of all the world am I!
 Transmuting man's unnatural enmity
 For man, the root of war's destructive lie,
 Into a sound and sane democracy;
 Whose dominant, humane, uplifting note
 Sets not a brother at a brother's throat!

San Francisco, February, 1915.

THE SENTENCE.

What grants it me, this gift of common-sense,
This quality of mind that bids me let
You go as one beneath my worth? And yet—
My spirit quails with need of you!—drawn tense
To aching silence by the mind's immense
Routine of logic that cannot forget
Although the heart forgives. And so I fret
Away the empty days at Love's expense.

The way of life is rugged, steep and drear.
I did but seek the clasp of mating hands—
Heart's solace of a heart for all my own!
When on the open road you wandered near,
I cried, "At last, here's one who understands!"
But destiny decreed, "On, on, alone!"

III.

RENUNCIATION.

I loved you,—loved you! in the days gone by;
The glad, mad days while Love held utter sway.
And oh, the promiseful, gold dreams that lay
Like beckoning stars athwart our common sky!
Alas,—they vanished in a mood, a sigh.
You steeled your heart and, manlike, went your way.
What was there left for me to do or say?
Against the night I pitched my voiceless cry!

God, ever listening God, stretched forth His hand,
And now I feel the holy calm descend
In twilight benediction o'er the land;
The zeal of right desire with God to friend;
The whirr of tiny wings across the blue;
But never, nevermore heart's need of you.

PAVLOWA.

Fair mortal, girt with wings invisible!
With art inimitable transcending art—
One moment, imaging the airy dart
Of bird or dragon-fly in some wild dell;
The next, revealing passion's languorous spell,
Ere merging into virtue's counterpart.
Her foot a rose leaf lighting on the heart;
Her smile a joy for after-years to tell.

Yet they who worship her but dimly guess
The arduous, lacerating years that lie
'Twixt aspiration, effort and success;
"Pavlowa, the incomparable!" they cry.
I peer into the vanquished years to ask—
What need all conquering held her to her task?

A TRIBUTE.

Maude Adams, synonym for every grace
Of woman wholly human, yet divine!
Her glowing, understanding heart the shrine
Whence genius bears immortal fires to trace
Man's soul at will upon the actress' face!
A woman of the stage, too pure and fine
For fame to mar or evil to malign—
A rose of earth adorning starry space.

The beautiful, the lovable and true,
Her noble nature mirrors down the years;
The virtue of the woman flaming through
The mimicry of laughter and of tears;
A star of stars entrancing every heart,
And yielding all in all of self to art.

TO ALMA.

Alma's Thelma, my childhood playmate's child!
Alma, the girl I knew, to woman grown,
Her clambered knees a toddling tyrant's throne,
Her days to mother-service reconciled.
To fates antipodal the years beguiled
Our sundering feet; and I, cast forth alone
Upon an evil world, unto my own
Return again, grief-taught while Alma smiled.

Much have I gleaned, from souls that drift in dark,
Of wisdom humbled, rooted deep in tears;
And though wee Thelma bears no naked mark
Of weal or woe predestined to her years,
I know, that whatsoe'er the fates impel,
If she but hold Love sacred, all is well.

KENDALL'S SONNET, AND DOROTHEA'S.

Melodious heart, so bravely caroled you,
Though lost delight lamented down your days,
Fair Dorothea, calm in sheltered ways,
Upleaned to list the lyric lure that drew
Her raptured soul the singer's soul unto.
No more, unmated, lone, her poet strays;
Warm-lipped and lustrous-eyed with love's amaze,
She goes to share a golden dream come true.

Sing, Kendall, then, of tranquil joys that press
On loyalty 'twixt dear and all-too dear—
The common cares, the unconcealed caress,
The lifted latch for friends and friendly cheer;
And all of these your inspiration find
To wing the song divine for all mankind.

VIII.

TO T. H. B.

There came a day, a day when sorrow's night
Obliterated all my waning sun.
Grief-desolate I stood and there was none
To brave my dark with what I sought of light.
Not one? Nay! you, unasked, essayed the height
That hazards all that life from life has won.
O soul invincible, that dared outrun
Contemporaneous mind, and dared do right!

Withholding petty beauty, God denied
You admiration in the general glance;
But yours the hand that brushed the world aside,
A righteous soul's conviction to advance.
Nor you, nor I, shall ever know regret;
But may I forfeit love if I forget!

TO R————s.

The house I live in decks the city's crown;
 And from beneath my window, streets of gray
 Run flat, then dip and lift a breathless way
 To stretch for many miles across the town.
 Green hills rise far beyond the roofs of brown;
 The heavens curve to meet the shimmering bay;
 And when the dusk comes to usurp the day,
 Alone I watch the flaming sun go down.

From work and play the homing folk fare by;
 And man-made lights flash forth innumera-ly;
 A myriad antique stars adorn the sky,
 Remote with night's primeval sovereignty.
 Earth's tranquil silences in silence woo—

* * * * * * *

My guilty heart cries guiltily for you!

THE MUSCLE DANCERS.

Tricked out with glittering gauds and garish lace,
With eyes too spiritless for lips so red,
Soul-agonized, derision-surfeited,
These women dance, their bodies sensual pace
With aching repetition shorn of grace —
Spent travesties of youth from young years fled,
Dissembling joy to frenzied music shed.
The curious crowd the curious out of place.

Nay, save your sneers! Judge not, for you see naught
But what you paid to see. These women dwell
In censured gloom shut out from lettered thought.
And so, before you stab with scorn, 't is well
To recollect that not to them, but you,
Belongs the vice that custom panders to.

TO GEORGE STERLING.

Poised godlike on some far Olympian height,
 Above this world of time and change, he sings;
 And from the soul's Promethean spark outflings
 Resplendent stars of song to range the night.
 Dull worldlings plod unmindful of that might
 Of music sounding high imaginings;
 No, not for these the splendid thought that rings
 Down endless morrows of increasing light.

Yet sometimes at the twilight of the day
 When sighs the brooding Autumn of the year,
 This empyrean singer chants a lay
 Of simpler things, a dream, a smile, a tear;
 And hearts that falter mid the struggling throng
 Drink in the healing spirit of the song.



SONNETS OF AN IDEAL LOVE.

I.

I said, "This city is self-centered, small;
Its people's hearts insensate to my need;
Their minds so limited to petty greed,
That I, a stranger, glimpse no chance at all
To gain success." All this, at my first call,
To you I said. Oh, you were kind indeed!
The timepiece on your desk marked jealous speed.
A pictured Lincoln pondered on the wall.

And when again into the street I fared,
There throbbed a city beautiful and new,
And starry-beautiful the dream we shared,
The dream the city shared with me of you,
The while I lifted to its cooling mist,
The lips that your withheld desire had kissed.

II.

Oh, they were glorious days on which I came
To sit beside your desk with you, and chat;
So eagerly discussed we this and that,
Divining in each other's breast the flame
We clarified wistful-eyed, yet dared not name.
The subtle turn of wit at times fell flat;
Our meeting eyes forgot to smile thereat.
And for what followed, dear, to whom the blame?

At but a word, a glance, the barriers fell!
I trembled in your arms! Against the white
Intensity of your desire, the shell
Of masking self-repression crumbled quite.
Yea! flame to flame your lips on my lips lay!
Soul merged with soul, forever and for aye!

III.

I have but glimpsed the portals of success —
Scarce looked upon the slowly opening door;
And now you speak of going on before,
Into that peace beyond all mortal stress.
I have but closed my hand on happiness,
The love of you that probes my spirit's core.
Dream you, since life for me can hold no more
Than you, that I can hold with life for less?

I faltered at your feet, fate's daunted tool!
A stricken, broken thing that smiled on death.
You hailed me "Great!" when others cried me "Fool!"
Inspired, uplifted me, instilled new breath!
And see! I write for all the world to know
That all I have and am, to you I owe!

IV.

You, you alone can weight the hours with grief;
 Compel the dragging anguish down my eyes,
 To slay the promise of the laughing skies,
Subdue the glint on every sunkissed leaf,
And rouse me from my dream. Pressed sheaf on sheaf,
 Dull pain within your silence multiplies.
 Beyond my door earth's summering beauty lies
Unprized of me who know that joy is brief.

To-morrow's sky may azure be or gray;
 The highway warm with sun or chill with rain;
Still shall the tears that to your silence stay,
 Suspend the blurring curtain of their pain.
 For if your smile return not with the dawn,
 The day for me is gone, forever gone!

This day between our inmost selves is spanned
A full year's toll of ecstasy and woe.

The direst grief that womankind may know
Was mine, made bearable beneath your hand.
So hours with you, springs in a desert land,
Relieved the tedious stretch of tragic show.

Bethink you, love, how one short year ago
Your name fell not in any deed I planned.

And now! Life's all I center in your heart,
Content to guide my rushlight by your star;
In secret from the world, a dream apart,
To love you for the crownless king you are,
Who gave me back, as only great souls can,
The faith that I had lost in God and man.

VI.

Against the window where I write, the rain
Beats ceaselessly a chant of pending doom,
And all about me in the room, my room,
Your books and flowers, gifts from hands so fain
To giving, echo, mutely-tongued, the strain
Of sighs unwearied in the outer-gloom,
Resounding on the hours as on a tomb
Where Love, death-barred, weeps bitter tears and vain.

O traitorous Yesterday! that went her way
Unmindful to redeem the promise-gold
Of a resplendent, love-fulfilled To-day!
The rain upon my heart is chill and cold.
Alone I wait, oppressed with dire alarms,
Who thought this day to revel in your arms.

VII.

Again, and yet again, the sun must rise;
And four times more the laggard hands creep round
The stolid clock, before I hear the sound
Of your still distant voice; for, modern-wise,
By this mute telephone you will apprise
Me of your presence on our trysting ground.
To-morrow's morrow beckons, rapture-crowned!
To-morrow's morrow, with your lips, your eyes!

Because you are not here to see them go
On joyous wing and fleet, indifferently,
With sluggish pace, the hours proceed, the slow,
Unwanted hours that have no heed of me.
But when again our sundering time is past,
Ah then all kinds of hours fly all too fast!

VIII.

My love for you I tell in phrases shod
With truth. If your controlling Fates, beguiled
From Fortune's best accordances, defiled
Your body's sweetness with the leper's rod,
And banished you to friendless, desolate sod,
Still would I cleave to you—abased, reviled
Of man—and smile on you as if I smiled
In heaven; and walk as if I walked with God!

And in that same exalted spirit I
Encourage, spur and speed you to success
Heaped on success. I let the world go by:
Desiring to your noble worth, no less
Than all of body, brain and soul to give.
O Love! I could not love you more! and live.

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